

The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests Landbird Point Count Monitoring Program

The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests have been conducting landbird monitoring using point counts since 1992. These point counts are a significant part of the Region 8 “Southern National Forest’s Migratory and Resident Landbird Conservation Strategy”. This strategy was developed in response to concern over significant long-term population declines for many Neotropical migratory birds (NTMB). The Strategy directs all National Forests in the Southern Region to participate in the landbird monitoring program. Each Forest is assigned a specific number of points to be completed, and stratified by habitat type. The data collected by individual Forests are compiled in the Region 8 Landbird database.

This monitoring program allows the Southern National Forests to access and track the status of forest breeding bird populations and their habitats over time. A key goal of the landbird monitoring program is to provide implementation, effectiveness, and validation monitoring for Forest Plans. The majority (11 of 15) of the MIS identified in the revised Forest Plan for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests are landbirds that are to be monitored through the annual point counts. They were chosen to represent the key habitats and major restoration issues of the revised plan. These species were selected as MIS primarily because the Forest had an effective program in place to monitor population trends. Using the established landbird monitoring program addresses concerns raised related to MIS monitoring.

Other sources of data on trends in bird populations are available such as the US Geological Service’s (USGS) Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS). These surveys have been in place since 1966 and are useful in evaluating regional and range-wide trends. However, the BBS has significant limitations relative to monitoring trends on National Forest lands. All data collected from BBS routes are taken along roadsides on both private and public lands. Roadside surveys do not reflect changes in in-stand forest conditions and therefore are not a good measure of National Forest conditions. More importantly, there are very few survey routes near the Forest. For example, there is only 1 active route in all the counties in and around the Chattahoochee National Forest. Therefore the quantity of data available for this part of the state is extremely limited. Although BBS data can be useful to evaluate regional trends across broad ownerships, these data are of limited value as a tool for monitoring population trends and the effects of management on the National Forest.

Land birds are an integral part of the revised Forest Plan both as MIS and elements of high conservation emphasis. For this reason, the established point count monitoring program is one of the highest priority monitoring elements for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests.

We collect additional bird point information all year long, but it is in addition to the large landbird point count database. This data is used as more of an occurrence database and is utilized in conjunction with the landbird database. It is simply a snapshot of the bird species that occur at a specific site on a certain day and time.